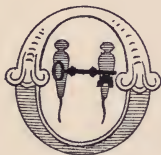




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THE

CHRISTMAS STORY

SOMEbody'S STOCKING.

A STORY OF THE
HAPPY DAYS OF
THE HOLIDAYS
IN THE
LIFE OF A
LITTLE BOY

THE
HAPPY DAYS OF THE HOLIDAYS



OLIVE LOGAN'S

CHRISTMAS STORY,

SOMEBODY'S STOCKING.



- I. WHERE THE STOCKING HUNG.
- II. WHAT WAS IN IT.
- III. SUGAR-PLUMS.
- IV. JUMPING JACK.
- V. ET VOILA TOUT.



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SOMEBODY'S STOCKING.

I. WHERE THE STOCKING HUNG.

THE Stocking hung on the door-post of a little room in the fourth story of a respectable tenement-house, not far from the great theatres of Broadway.

It was fastened to the door-post by an iron fork which pierced the delicate meshes with its cruel prongs.

It was a Stocking of thread, too thin and fine to be worn at the chilling Christmas season; and it was easy to see that it belonged to a shapely ankle and a tiny foot.

The tenants of the building, as they passed by and saw it hanging there, looked at it curiously, but nobody touched it or thought of putting any thing in it; till at last Jack came along.

Jack stopped when he came along.

"Well, I vow," said Jack, with an air of never having seen such an extraordinary affair before, "here's Somebody's Stocking."

Whose?

Ah, that was the very question Jack asked himself: "Whose?"

Now what *was* it which made Jack's memory go wandering back through the shadows of the dead and gone Past, at sight of Somebody's Stocking hanging by Somebody's door?

It did go wandering back, that is certain, and the result of its wandering was that Jack heaved a sigh, and again asked himself, "Whose?"

A woman's, of course. That was clear enough.

And a pretty woman's, of course; for it was not possible this fine white shapely stocking belonged to a woman with an ugly face and an ill-formed ankle and a clumsy foot.

"It is just the Stocking," thought Jack, still standing in the growing shadows, and looking at it, "that She might have worn."

He sighed again as he thought of her, and again his memory went wandering back through the shadows of the dead and gone Past, and showed him her picture as she was when they were children together, and when she hung her stocking out in the little

door-porch, in the old village, for him to see and to put some sugar-plums in, as he did.

And once more he sighed, as he wondered where she was — whether she were living still, or whether the daisies in the village graveyard were growing over her.

“Why,” he said at last to himself — necessarily to himself, for there was no one else present to say it to — “why, in all my journeyings about the world, does her face journey always with me? and why do I linger so lovingly over my thoughts of her when the Christmas time comes round? and what,” and here he looked again at the door-post, “has Somebody’s, or anybody’s, Stocking to do with *her*?”

And then Jack thought that if he had a wife to love and to care for, he might forget her, and all about her, and nevermore do such a foolish

thing as to linger over a mere Stocking on Somebody’s door-post.

He thought he would go away and not be foolish any more, and as he was going he said, — and this was being more foolish than ever —

“Perhaps I might marry the owner of the Stocking?”

Foolish indeed! To marry a girl because and only because you are pleased with her Stocking, were certainly the depth of the foolish and the height of the absurd.

For, after all, this Somebody might be the respectable but red-faced Irish washerwoman he met sometimes on the stairs. Oh, most decidedly, Jack couldn’t marry a washerwoman; for Jack was an artist in his way, and a very good way it was in his opinion.

And besides, the washerwoman was already married.

So that settled *that* matter.

II. WHAT WAS IN IT.

NOTHING.

Not a thing.

Whoever this Somebody was, she had found no admirers to put presents in her Christmas Stocking.

She had hung it there, he could well imagine, in a hopeful, childish way, believing perhaps in the sweet but stupid fallacy of Kriss Kringle — and perhaps when the Christmas should be gone, and Bethlehem’s Star should have ceased to shine, and the Sun of wickedness and greed should have arisen in the great city, she would

find her stocking as she had left it —

Empty!

Ah, that would be sad!

Well, we all have our disappointments in this weary world. We set our hopes on an object of desire; we long for it wearily and anxiously; we train our vines patiently, carefully, certain that they will bear the fruit for which we yearn; and then —

(Blank, if you please: To the printer.)

It is blank whether we please or no.

I, being a woman with a woman's weakness, fall in love with a man who vows he loves me, and will be true to me to-day and to-morrow and to all eternity.

He is true to me to-day ; but when to-morrow comes, without at all waiting for eternity, he has married a girl for her money and left my poor heart yearning wearily after —

(Another blank, if you please.)

You, being a man, with your strong brain and your desire for distinction, pursue the phantom Fame or the firefly Fortune, giving to the chase all there is in you of energy, will, determination, power, and when you catch the brilliant thing that has lured you, you find it less than a phantom, less than a firefly ; a bubble, which bursts at your touch, and is like the Stocking,

Empty !

Jack resolved that the Stocking should not long remain empty. Why should Somebody be disappointed altogether, when a trifle — the merest trifle — would perhaps fill her young heart with happiness ?

Young ?

Oh, that question was settled long ago. Young of course. Somebody was as fair as her Stocking was white, as fine in quality as a woman as her Stocking was as a Stocking.

So now to nullify its emptiness — to fill the vacuum which nature abhors in Stockings.

He drew a silver dollar from his pocket : he looked around in the growing gloom to be sure that nobody was watching him ; he opened the Stocking wide at the top —

Hark ! - - - - somebody coming !

Jack suddenly changed his mind and walked quickly away—up to his room, shutting the door after him with a bang.

III. SUGAR-PLUMS.

TING-A-LING-LING-LING ! Thank goodness for it ! Down comes the curtain.

Oh what ? It must go up again ?

Yes, the audience wants another look at the transformation scene.

"Attitudes !" cries the Prompter, and claps his hands.

Kitty lifts her gilded vase on a level with her black eyes, points her unmoving finger at it, and up the curtain goes, while the lights blaze, and the pedestals turn slowly, and the orchestra drones its intoxicating music.

At last it is over. Down they come off the pedestals — all the fairies and all the water-sprites ; released from his position is Harlequin ; off come Pantaloon's false nose and chin ; and Clown facetiously asks Columbine if she would not like to play it all over, just for fun.

"Ladies and gentlemen !"

All stand motionless, for this is the voice of the stage-manager.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the evening performance begins at half-past seven *pre-cisely*. No ten minutes' grace."

The ladies and gentlemen shrug their shoulders at this announcement, and one of the ladies, who takes in plain sewing, which she does between the waits, says to one of the gentlemen, who belongs to a fire company in the Bowery, that she always did despise these *matinée* performances, and always shall.

"Speak well of the bridge that carries you over," replies the gentleman.

"As Booth did of his nose till the bridge of it got broken," says Clown, who will have his joke.

"What time is it?" asks somebody.

"A quarter to six," replies somebody else.

"My goodness! We never shall have time to go home and get dinner!"

"Dinner!" echoes Pantaloon, who is cast for the heavy parts as a general thing, and has a great contempt for himself in the Christmas pantomime, where he does little but get knocked down, and be helped up, and bawl and grimace over his petty woes. "Dinner! *You* think of dinner—I of the revenge! Ha, ha-a-a!" and he strides behind the wings.

"I'd like to revenge myself on a good fat turkey," says Columbine. "What is Christmas without a turkey?"

"Exactly! Also, what is home without a mother?"

Nobody seems inclined to answer these pertinent queries, and the Christmas players go thronging toward the dressing-rooms.

"Oh, say!"

Clown speaks.

"Suppose we send and get something to eat, and have it in the green room?"

"Agreed," says a voice.

"Agreed," says another voice, in a higher key.

"A-a-agreed!" is given in the well-known strain of Hecate, and instantly joining hands the players form a ring, dancing wildly, and singing in unison for their own private diversion that which they have often sung for the diversion of the public.

"Around, around!

Around, around!

About, about!

About, about!

All ill keep running,

Running in!

All good keep out!"

"Stop!" roars Pantaloon. "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes!"

It proves to be the leading man, the poetical Hamlet, about whom all the Fifth Avenue girls are raving, who opens the back-door and stalks in with an umbrella under his arm, overshoes on his feet, a yellow-covered play-book in his hand, and a cold in his head.

"You're earning your *sal* easy," says Clown to him with some reproach.

"I earn it hard enough the rest of the year," says Hamlet; "it would be a pity if I couldn't rest when the Christmas pantomime is on."

But the Clown does not hear what Hamlet says, for the words are drowned in another wild chorus of the circling ring:

"Send down *Sal*!

Send down *Sal*!

Send down *Sala-ree*!"

"Something too much of this," says the tragedian with a frown.

"What says the king?"

"The king says he's hungry. Where's the call-boy? Let's send him out. What shall it be? Oysters?"

"Ay, my good lord."

"Fried oysters, Smirkins" — to the call-boy — "and let 'em be hot."

All adjourn to the green room, except the call-boy, who disappears into the street.

Smirkins is a boy of twenty-nine or thirty who has been in love so many times that his face is seamed with lines of care, and a great Woe sits ever on his unhappy brow.

Smirkins has been in love with all the tragedy queens known to fame, and a large number of the ballet girls whom fame has never deigned to know. In the case of the tragedy queens Smirkins's love is a thing of sighs and glances and unspoken distress. In the case of the ballet girls Smirkins's love dares to find voice; but that does not seem to help the matter greatly.

At present, Smirkins is desperately in love with Kitty King, of the ballet, who is very sorry for Smirkins, but does not care a rush for him.

But at present Smirkins is buried in the depths of an oyster cellar, in quest of oysters fried.

"Boo! boo! how cold it is!" cries Columbine, who has been in her dressing room and got a shawl. "I *do* wonder what people want to come out to the theater for in such bitter weather as this — and on Christmas day too!"

"To be sure," answers Harlequin,

who is of English birth, and who according to his own account has passed the whole of his life prior to his unfortunate step of coming to America in dancing before the Queen and the rest of the royal family. "In Hengland no one thinks of going to the theater hon a Christmas."

"What's boxing night?" asks Clown.

"The night harfter, to be sure! And harn't they a jolly crowd then?"

No one seems disposed to answer this question, for at the moment re-enter Smirkins, with oysters fried, followed by a waiter heavily laden.

"All hail, Smirkins!"

Shout unanimous.

"You're very good, Mr. Smirkins," says Kitty King, and Smirkins colors violently and joyfully.

"The labor we delight in physics pain," answers the call-boy, who is ambitious to be an actor, but whose histrionic triumphs are as yet restricted to appearing before the curtain between acts, for the purpose of taking up carpets, removing fragments of letters, and the like, on which occasions he is wildly cheered, and boisterously addressed as "Soup! Soup!" greatly to his annoyance.

The waiter having gone, it is found that there is a pitcher of beer and no glasses to drink it from.

"Why there's nothing to drink out of!" laments Columbine plaintively.

"There's the goblets we use in Macbeth."

This by the property-man, who stands leaning against the door-post

with a paper cap on his head and a patch of gilding on his nose.

The offer is altogether facetious, for the goblets are made of pasteboard, and will hold nothing but emptiness.

"Macbeth's goblets?" roars Hamlet, who is also Macbeth as frequently as the public will possibly stand it. "Macbeth's goblets to drink beer out of? Oh, to what base uses we may return, Horatio!"

"Certainly," answers Clown. "Great Alexander stopped a beer barrel."

"So would you," returns Pantaloon, "if you could get a chance — with your mouth at the bung-hole."

"Caitiff!" roars the Clown with his mouth full of oysters fried.

And Kitty King laughs merrily.

"How was your house this afternoon?" inquires the tragedian in a contemptuous tone.

"Splendid," is the reply.

"Splendid, eh?" responds the leading man. "Ah well! Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw! The public taste is sadly deteriorating. Why don't they patronize the legitimate? Why won't the public rush to see my Lear for two years at a stretch?"

"Ah, that would be rather stretching good nature," says Clown.

"The public would have to be as crazy as Lear was, to do such a thing," says Pantaloon.

"Shut up! — perturbed spirit," growls the tragedian; "and give us a sup of your beer."

Spite of quibble and retort, it is easy

to perceive that there is no ill-feeling here, and that a spirit of jollity such as is seldom to be met with elsewhere is prevalent.

I think the actor *chez lui*, if an actor may be said to have a *chez lui*, is a very different creature to that which he appears *chez* the superficial and unprofessional observer.

The superficial and unprofessional observer may judge the actor to be a stupid and uninteresting creature off the stage. He may wonder where that genius is hidden which shines out so brightly before the footlights. He may even doubt the existence of that genius, and he inclined to reconstruct his former opinions, concerning it.

The truth is that a good actor on the stage is generally a poorer actor off it than any man in society. He is reticent in speech, often awkward in bearing. Perkins, who is in the dry goods line, quite eclipses him in all the small graces. Medoc, the wine merchant, who never read a play of Shakespeare's quite through in his life, spouts bad poetry among his friends till they all think he would have made a better actor than the professional now delighting the town, who sits by in silence while Medoc airs his abilities. Possibly even the professional himself thinks so.

But put the actor among his fellows — and his fellowesses — and believe me, he will instantly become quite a sparkling and romantic creature, from whose tongue drop constant gems.

Among those who can quote back at him, the actor does not hesitate to

quote freely. Give him Milton and he responds with Shakspeare. Give him Pope and he returns you Byron. And with his quotings he will mingle an everyday jargon which shall be full of humor and often even of wit.

Mrs. Siddons stabbed the potatoes. My tragic friend Uno, who plays Macbeth so well, always murders a Duncan when he carves his Christmas turkey.

But bless you, there is no Christmas turkey here!

And what is more —

"Now then! Lively! Everybody to begin!"

The prompter is bawling in at the green room door.

Half past seven already!

"And so ends *my* holiday hour this blessed Christmas!" murmurs the pretty ballet girl, Kitty King, whom the call-boy Smirkins so strongly affects, but who heeds not his affection.

The curtain is up, and Kitty is on with the rest.

"What did you find in your Stocking, Sugar-plums?" whispers the call-boy in her ear in one of her waits.

Kitty starts with surprise.

"Who told *you* to call me Sugar-plums?" she says.

"My heart," says Smirkins, sighing heavily, and placing his hand over his watch-pocket. "No offense, I hope?"

"You surprised me so," says Kitty; "for that is what I used to be called when I was a little girl."

"Would we had met in that happy day," says Smirkins with another sigh.

"As for the Stocking," says Kitty, "there was nothing in it."

"But you did not take it down?" says Smirkins.

"No."

"Don't then. Let it hang. Sometimes Santa Claus comes along on Christmas night. You'll find something in it to-morrow morning."

"Ladies of the ballet!" cries the prompter.

"Ladies of the ballet!" echoes the call-boy.

Kitty being one of the ladies of the ballet goes off with the rest into the glare of the footlights again.

Smirkins mutters to himself, as he walks away,

"I'll put *something* in her stocking, if I have to steal the money to buy it with."

A wicked and most inexcusable resolve, you think; but then, perhaps you never have been so much in love as Smirkins was — or at least so often.

At last came the transformation scene again, and standing on her pedestal as it went round and round, with nothing to do but point at her gilded vase and retain her attitude, Kitty King thought again of that foolish Stocking on the door-post.

Oh, no doubt it was a very foolish Stocking, or at least she had been very foolish to hang it there.

But the truth is that when she was a child — not so very long ago — Kitty lived in a pleasant little village where it was the custom to hang your stocking on the door-post.

Yes; but those village girls with whom it was the custom, had fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters.

Kitty had none.

And some of them — the big girls — had beaux.

Kitty had one. Smirkins. Not much of a one, but all she had. She didn't think much of him.

In the first place Smirkins was too old to suit Kitty's fastidious taste. In the next place Smirkins was nothing but a call-boy, and rather a stupid call-boy at that, and incapable of taking care of himself, let alone a wife. In the next place Smirkins was always falling in love with somebody or other and making a fool of himself in the most unblushing manner.

Oh, decidedly Smirkins was *too* ridiculous!

Besides, he was not a thoughtful beau. He always went off to his lodgings as soon as the performance was over, and left her to go home alone.

To be sure, she had once told him she preferred to go home alone, for he

was tiresome; but if he were any thing but a ridiculous, foolish and altogether incapable Smirkins he would never have been frightened away by *that*!

That night when she crept home tired, weary, with aching feet and throbbing temples, she glanced at the Stocking as she went into her room, but did not take it down.

"For," said she, "Christmas is not over yet."

She was mistaken.

A steeple-clock ringing midnight chimes told her she was mistaken. Christmas was over.

"Well," she said, shivering a little with the cold, "I'll leave it till morning anyhow."

And as Smirkins locked up the stage manuscripts he said to himself that he would go right down and put *something* in her Stocking, if it were nothing more than a jumping-jack.

And then Smirkins went home and forgot all about it because the weather was so awfully cold.

IV. JUMPING JACK.

If the theater was crowded on Christmas day and evening, the circus was absolutely packed.

"What a house!" said the ringmaster to Mr. Merryman, in a whisper.

"Perfect knocker!" said Mr. Merryman to the ringmaster, in another whisper.

The performance was received with

such cheers and *such* shouts! The wonderful Monsieur Jacques had half a dozen bunches of flowers thrown to him.

The wonderful Monsieur Jacques, as he was called in the circus bills, was the champion leaper of the circus. He could leap over six horses all standing side by side and turn a somer-

set in the air, coming down in the ring on his feet. He could jump over the heads of two men, one on the other's shoulders, without brushing a hair of the head over which his feet skimmed. He could turn two somersets in the air at once, as easily as you can turn over this page. He could jump twelve feet and thirteen inches on a dead level without any spring-board or any run for the start.

Oh, a wonderful man was Monsieur Jacques.

He was not a Monsieur, however, and his name was not Jacques — though there is nothing wonderful about *that*, in these days of high-sounding professional cognomens.

His name was John Smithson; but nobody called him so. To all his friends and acquaintances — to the ringmaster and the Clown, and the equestrians and the gymnasts, one and all, he was known as Monsieur Jack.

Jack was twenty-three years old. He was a handsome Jack, besides being an agile one, and what was better still he was an intelligent, thoughtful Jack, and what was best of all he was a good Jack — good and true, steady and quiet, with no worse habits than the one habit of cigar-smoking, and that is saying a good deal for him in these days when all the young men learn to toss off all sorts of tangle-some fluid villainies as naturally as so many naturals.

Jack was neither dissipated nor idle. He was neither a spendthrift nor a bar-room lounge. He had his modest

room in a tenement-house, and there he passed the greater part of his time when he was not at the circus, practicing his muscular exercises in the day-time, or performing his wonderful feats in the evening.

He was such a graceful, springy, well-shaped, bright-faced lad that many a young girl who had been at the circus that day and that night thought over and over again of the handsome young gymnast when she went home, and dreamed of him when she went to sleep.

But Monsieur Jack's thoughts were preoccupied that day and that night; and of all the things that should preoccupy the thoughts of an intelligent young man, what should Monsieur Jack be thinking about but Somebody's Stocking!

Thinking of Somebody's Stocking, he strolled into the theater which was still open, and there in the ballet which was being danced he saw a number of stockings.

Not such stockings as Somebody's, though!

And while Jack was looking at the number of stockings on the stage and wondering what was in them — whether flesh and blood, or merely woven wool — for Jack, being in the profession, knew of the mysteries of padding, though disdaining them in his own person — there flitted across his vision like a dream of the dead and gone Past, the sweet young face he had known years ago, and to whose owner he had given the name of Sugar-plums.

Could it be Kitty King?

He searched the play-bill. No name there. She belonged to the catalogue of nameless nobodies who do most of the work and get least of the pay.

While he sat there the sweet face went away with the others which belonged to the drove of nameless ones, and gave place to a great creature shockingly unclad, who came and threw herself madly about, pointing her toe in the face of the trumpeter, and the bass fiddler, and the tenor drummer, one after the other.

Jack arose and left the theater.

"I must be mistaken," he said to himself as he walked to his lodgings.

"It can never be that little girl who lived in the village and who used to call me Jumping Jack. No, no—it can never be!"

And why pray, Mr. Jumping Jack? Why pray can it never be? Mr. Jumping Jack explains no further, having reached his room—having passed by the doorpost where Somebody's Stocking is still hanging empty in the darkness, and reached his room. He unlocks his door, goes in, locks it inside, and slowly prepares for bed.

"I'd give the world," he says, forgetting altogether that he has not the world to give, "if it were she. But it is not. I was mistaken. *Et voila tout.*"

V. ET VOILA TOUT.

MISTAKEN or not, the recollection of the ballet-girl's face torments Monsieur Jack sadly.

He can not sleep.

He tosses and tumbles on his bed, and all night long he dances through an interminable ballet in his dreams, and points his toe in the face of the trumpeter, and the bass fiddler, and the tenor drummer.

And when in his dreams he is not dancing through the interminable ballet he is standing on his head at the circus and seeing, to his horror, the sweet-faced modest little ballet-girl trying to vault over six horses standing side by side, and falling and killing herself.

He wakes early in the morning and bathes himself and dresses himself

and prepares to go down; and going down he meets the jolly washerwoman with the red face who gives him the top of the marnin' and calls Heaven to bless his honest young eyes.

As he reaches the bottom of the flight of stairs leading down to the fourth floor he stops.

There it hangs still.

Pinned to the doorpost by the cruel prongs of the old-fashioned iron fork, there it hangs still — Somebody's Stocking.

He cares little now who Somebody is.

So far as he is concerned the Stocking may belong to the washerwoman, or to any other woman.

The idea of indulging in sentimental reflections about a woman merely

because you have seen her Stocking — Empty!

And yet as he comes close to it again in passing he does not resist the inclination to pause and look at it once more.

He would *really* like to know whose it is — just for curiosity's sake.

And just for curiosity sake he stares with all his might at it.

The door behind the post is opened softly and a white hand is stretched forth to take in the Stocking.

"Empty!" the owner of the hand murmurs, not seeing the young man, and —

"Oh, Sugar-plums!"

The young man darts forward as if he were going to vault over six horses headlong, and grasps her hands in his.

"Dear little Sugar-plums, how came you here?"

"What! *Not* Jumping Jack!" with tears gushing into her eyes, and making her look like an angel right down from the skies.

Or so Mr. Jack thinks.

"Yes — just Jumping Jack. No one else."

Oh, she is so glad! She is all alone, and so friendless — with father and mother dead, and so little salary, and two rude young men coming every night to the same orchestra seats, and staring at her through their opera-glasses, and writing her insolent love-letters.

("I'll opera-glass 'em!" mutters Mr. Jack under his breath.)

"And you?" says Sugar-plums.

He tells her he is flourishing. He

gets a large salary. He lives in humble lodgings, it is true, but his income is large enough for him to marry, if he likes, and go board in a fashionable street. And then he sighs; and sitting by her side on her little sofa he lifts her white fingers idly with his own, and drops them, and picks them up again, and brings them close to his lips to look at them closely and make sure he has not broken them.

"And what are you doing, Jumping Jack?" asks Sugar-plums.

Why is it possible Sugar-plums don't know what he is doing?

He is a gymnast — the wonder of the town — has she not heard of him? He is the wonderful Monsieur Jacques.

"Oh!" she exclaims, with great eyes. Is he Monsieur Jacques? — the great Monsieur Jacques? — whom she has been longing to see, but she never has a night off? Oh, is it possible he is the extraordinary Monsieur Jacques?

And she looks at him as if he were the Gorilla, or some other great man.

Yes, he is Monsieur Jacques. Doesn't Sugar-plums remember how smart at springing and leaping he was as a boy?

Does she remember? How can she forget? Was not that the reason all the boys nicknamed him Jumping Jack?

Ah yes, to be sure. Well, he has turned his talent in that direction to some account now, and all the world flocks to see the gymnastics of Monsieur Jacques.

"I have traveled all over the world myself, Sugar-plums. I have performed in London, at the famous Astley's that

you and I used to read about in our story-books when we were children. I performed in Paris two seasons—one summer at the Hippodrome and one winter at the Cirque de l'Imperatrice. In Paris it was not necessary to call me Monsieur Jacques. Jacqueses are too common in Paris. I was—now what do you think I was on the bills in Paris, Sugar-plums?”

She thought a minute.

“Jumping Jack?” she said, lifting her head as a bird might lift its head after picking up a crumb.

“The very thing!” said Mr. Jack, clapping his hands. “What an extraordinary talent you have for guessing, Sugar-plums!”

“And then of course you learned to speak French, Jumping Jack?”

“Oh yes, I can speak French as well as I can English. *Je parle bien, allez!* Understand?”

Sugar-plums shook her head. “I don't know a word of French,” she said.

“*Ah, que je voudrais vous crôquer, petite* Sugar-plums!” uttered Jack in a low tone.

But she understood this no better than the other.

There was a pause in the little room.

A long, long pause.

And then the water in the tea-kettle boiled over, and sputtered and choked and hissed as if it were a critical spectator of this performance and felt displeased at the performers.

“Oh, dear!” cried Sugar-plums, starting up and running to it and trying to appease it—even prepared to return its admission fee if it insisted on it—“oh, dear!”

“Did you call me?” said Jumping Jack slyly.

Sugar-plums blushed.

“Don't tease me, Jackie?” she said.

“Well, then, I won't,” said Mr. Jack; and then there was another long pause, at which the tea-kettle began to hiss again in renewed displeasure.

“I shall have to put you out, Mrs. Tea-kettle,” said Sugar-plums, and she lifted it off the fire and set it on the hearth, where it subsided into an inglorious state of silence and dejection.

Sugar-plums drew a long breath and looked at the little table all spread for breakfast.

Would Monsieur Jacques stay and take breakfast with her?

Of course he would; he was only too happy.

And he took breakfast with her, and was not too happy, but just happy enough.

Happy enough, too, when breakfast was over, to steal up quite close to her side and say softly,

“Sugar-plums!”

“Well Jackie?”

“Do you remember how I used to love you when I was a boy?”

“Oh, yes,” said she, laughing gently. “I remember.”

“I'm glad you do.”

“But that, Jack, was—when you were a boy.”

Jumping Jack seemed a trifle disconcerted by this — but not for long.

"Sugar-plums?" once more.

"Yes, Jackie."

"I love you still."

"Oh, Jumping Jack!"

"Sorry?" queried Jack apprehensively.

"No, Jack. Glad," said she. "I *am* glad."

"Will you marry me then, Kitty Sugar-plums?"

She pressed his hand hard — as hard as she could — with the hand he was holding, and shut her eyes for a minute or two as if something dazzled her.

When she opened them again, tears ran over from amid the thick long lashes.

"Crying?" said Jack, looking very much disturbed.

"For joy, Jackie," she said. "Crying for joy."

And she cried for joy while he went on:

"I have always loved you, Kitty dear — always. Ever since I can remember any thing at all, I remember having loved little Kitty King. I loved you as a boy, when you were a little girl, and we were always together; when we went to school together, and sat only two forms apart, and when I used to bring you nuts and apples. Do you remember that?"

Oh, yes — oh, yes, indeed, she remembered that — remembered it well, and should never forget it — never, never!

"I loved you even then, Kitty, and I have never in all my life loved

any one else. When I grew up into a big boy, and moved away to New York with my father, I said to myself that I would go back some day to the little village under the hill and marry Kitty King."

"But you forgot to go back, didn't you, Jumping Jack?"

"Forgot, Sugar-plums? Forgot? Oh, *no*! I did go back; but Kitty King was gone away — no one knew where. I loved you then, Kitty, so much that I thought my heart would break. And ever since then, since I have been a man, all these years we have been separated, I have loved you. I loved your Stocking when I saw it. I meant to put something in it, but I said that I would put nothing in a Stocking which might after all belong to somebody I could not love. And so thinking I did put in the best thing I owned in the world — the best thing any man owns, and the best thing he can give to a woman."

"What is that, dear Jack?"

"My heart."

"Oh, Jackie!" and she puts her head down upon his breast where the heart is beating; beating love for her with all its throbs.

"When will you, darling?" he whispers softly.

"Whenever *you* say, dear Jackie," she whispers in reply.

"Then now at once; now when the whole earth is purified for us by the holy Christmas tide; now when the world is wearing its holiday dress, and the old snow-covered city glows warm at its heart with the cheery fires

which always blaze so merrily all the Christmas week ; now when all hearts should leap for joy. Will you, Kitty Sugar-plums ? Will you marry me *to-day* — the day after Christmas ? ”

“ Yes. ”

He draws her toward him gently, his sweet, sweet Sugar-plums ; he puts his arm about her waist, his sweet, sweet Sugar-plums ; his unsullied lips touch her young fresh lips in the first kiss of love — the first kiss of sweet, sweet Sugar-plums and splendid Jumping Jack — a heavenly kiss — a Christmas kiss —

Which is interrupted by a rap as of somebody's knuckles on Somebody's door.

And Sugar-plums comes down out of Paradise to the humdrum earth again, and having reached the humdrum earth, cries out,

“ Come in ! ”

Enter Smirkins.

“ Good-morning, Miss Kitty,” says Smirkins, with a grave and apprehensive observation of Mr. Jack.

Whereupon Miss Kitty makes the two gentlemen to know each other, and the effect of the two gentlemen's knowing each other is that the theatrical gentleman, Mr. Smirkins, is quite awed by the consciousness that he

is standing in the presence of the wonderful Monsieur Jacques, and it takes him a distressing length of time to get over that feeling of awe.

But he gets over it at last ; and they all take comfort together ; and Smirkins explains that it was so cold last night he thought he would wait till this morning before coming with something for the Stocking ; and then he pulls a ridiculous wooden Jumping Jack out of his pocket, and its appearance is the signal for such an extraordinary amount of laughter on the part of Kitty King and Mr. Jack that Smirkins at once concludes that his appearance on the scene is a triumphant success, and he laughs as heartily as they.

Well ! Every thing must have an end. They were done laughing at last ; and then Kitty explained that she had a real live Jumping Jack which was so much better than a wooden one she was going to marry it.

And Smirkins was sad at first ; and glad after he had thought it over a little ; and by the time he had accepted an invitation to go to the wedding in the afternoon his face was rosy red with the reflection of the joy of Sugar-plums and Jumping Jack.

Et voila tout.

THE END.

MEMOIRS

OF

SILVIO PELLICO;

OR

M Y P R I S O N S.

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